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School Reform News

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"This Battlefield Is America!"

Howard Fuller fights to rescue children

photo: Marquette University

George A. Clowes

The battle for expanding school choice options is being fought city by city across the United States, declared Howard Fuller, chairman of the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), delivering an impassioned speech to more than 600 invited guests at the Alliance's third annual symposium in Dallas, Texas, on March 1. Among the cities he identified as battlegrounds were Buffalo, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Dayton, Ohio; Los Angeles, California; Denver, Colorado; Dallas, Texas; and Washington, DC.

"This battlefield is America!" proclaimed Fuller. "This battlefield is wherever our children are being undereducated, miseducated, or not educated. ... This battlefield is wherever there are low-income and working class black families who cry out for options to better educate their children and are told that they have no right to choose by people who have choice for their own children."

"Power to the People"

BAEO's mission, he told the audience, is "to rescue our children from the depths of these educational wastelands that are taking away their spirit, vacating their minds, and consigning them to a life of poverty."

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A Nation Still at Risk

Little to show for 20 years of effort

David W. Kirkpatrick

This month marks the 20th anniversary of the publication of one federal report that did not end up on a shelf gathering dust, but instead inspired significantly increased spending on public education, although this ultimately produced little progress in student achievement. That report was *A Nation at Risk*, the product of a bipartisan National Commission on Excellence in Education, appointed by then Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell.

The Commission's 18 members included public school administrators, the 1981-82 National Teacher of the Year, the President of Yale University, a Nobel Laureate, a former governor, and the retired chairman of Bell Labs, among others. The Commission's work was largely praised by President Ronald Reagan as well as other political leaders and educators.

The report included two of the most famous statements ever made about the nation's public schools, that we were facing "a rising tide of mediocrity,"and "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war."

The commissioners did not merely sit around a table and draw their own con-

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High-Stakes Tests Vindicated

Krista Kafer

Can standardized tests provide a reliable gauge of student achievement and school quality? ✔ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know

Can standardized tests still provide a reliable gauge of student achievement and school quality when test results are used to reward or sanction schools ("high-stakes" tests)? ✔ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't Know

Do high-stakes tests encourage cheating by schools, teachers, and students, thus exaggerating student achievement? ☐ Yes ✔ No ☐ Don't Know

In a new study of school systems enrolling 9 percent of all U.S. public school students, scholars with the Manhattan Institute for Public Policy found "account-

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CAPITOL HILL BEAT

DC Vouchers Return to Front Burner

Don Soifer

The significance of the Supreme Court's historic *Zelman* decision last June was recognized immediately by elected supporters of parental choice in education. Representative Jeff Flake (R-Arizona) was among those who mused on the enormity of the decision's impact.

"The best thing we can do to improve education is to expand parental choice and increase competition," he said at the time, "and today's ruling will allow that to happen."

In the opening weeks of his second term, Flake rose to his own challenge by introducing the District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act. The proposal updates the plan championed in recent years by now-retired Rep. Dick Armey (R-Texas), offering vouchers for District of Columbia children in grades K-12 with family incomes below 185 percent of the poverty line.

The Flake plan allows poor families to receive scholarships of up to $5,000 ($3,750 for families within the limit but above the poverty threshold) or the cost of tuition—whichever is lower. Students can choose to attend any public or private school in the District or in nearby Maryland or Virginia.

President George W. Bush's FY 2004 budget also includes a school voucher program for DC families. Education Secretary Rod Paige described the administration's proposal as one in which vouchers would be provided only if District officials agreed to opt into the plan. But an aide to the Secretary later speculated to the *Washington Post* that vouchers could still be awarded through a nonprofit scholarship organization in the event the District did not choose to participate directly.

Funding for District vouchers in the President's budget is provided through a proposed new $75 million Choice Incentive Fund to support expanded choice opportunities through competitive grants. House Education Committee Chairman John Boehner (R-Ohio) praised the new fund, noting the importance of advancing parental choice efforts in the midst of unprecedented increases in federal education spending.

"It's essential that some of those resources be used to provide new options for low-income parents, and new support for charter schools," he said.

In a December 2002 paper for the Cato Institute that concluded new options were needed in the District, policy analyst Casey J. Lartigue Jr. noted 36 percent of DC public school students scored "Below Basic" in mathematics on the Stanford 9 achievement test in 2001. In reading, 25 percent scored "Below Basic." He also observed that in more than two-thirds of District high schools, 90 percent of students tested at levels of either Basic or Below Basic in both reading and math.

As expected, the voucher plans provoked a heated response as District officials—including Mayor Anthony Williams, School Board President Peggy Cooper Cafritz, and Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton—all leaped to challenge the voucher concept.

"The failure of some public schools to offer even the semblance of an education seems to upset voucher critics less than the mere mention of vouchers does," observed a February 12 *Washington Post* editorial endorsing the President's plan.

Some expressed concern that the size of the vouchers would fall short of the full cost of a private education. Per-pupil public school spending in the District topped $9,900 for the 1999-2000 school year, the third highest in the nation behind only New Jersey and New York.

"If the voucher program goes forward in the District, we hope it will contain enough funds to meet the cost of private tuition," the *Post* continued.

Bush Tax Credits

Bush's fiscal year 2004 budget also contains $226 million in refundable tax credits for parents who choose to move their children out of public schools identified as in need of improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act. Those parents would receive a credit of 50 percent of the first $5,000 in tuition, fees, and transportation costs incurred in transferring to a private school or another public school. The credit would be refundable, offering a direct pay-out to parents who owe no taxes because of their low income.

No Child Left Behind requires public school districts to facilitate choice for families stuck with low-performing schools. To date, the options made available to those parents have been very limited, as school districts have said better options simply do not exist. Many who supported last year's reforms see the Bush tax credit plan as representing a logical and powerful next step.

Don Soifer is executive vice president of the Lexington Institute. His email address is **soifer@lexingtoninstitute.org.**

CORRECTION
In the article "Voucher and Tax Credit Programs" in the February 2003 issue of *School Reform News*, an income cap was indicated for the Iowa tax credit program. In fact, the Iowa program has no income limits. *School Reform News* regrets the error.

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clusions. To the contrary, they funded some 40 studies on different aspects of education, held public hearings, conducted panel discussions, and solicited opinions on reform.

But, as Education Policy Institute Chairman Myron Lieberman has pointed out, the commissioners ignored the role of teacher unions and collective bargaining, a major—and some might say fatal—omission. And, as the distinguished educator Mario D. Fantini wrote shortly thereafter, their recommendations largely consisted of doing "more of what we already have—more of what has already caused the problem in the first place."

Startling Findings

Nonetheless, the report's specific findings were startling enough. For example:

- "... on 19 academic tests American students were never first or second and, in comparison with other industrialized nations, were last seven times."
- "Average achievement of high school students on most standardized tests is lower than 26 years ago ..."
- "The College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) demonstrate a virtually unbroken decline from 1963 to 1980."
- "Many 17-year-olds do not possess the 'higher order' intellectual skills we should expect of them. Nearly 40 percent cannot draw inferences from written material; only one-fifth can write a persuasive essay; and only one-third can solve a mathematics problem requiring several steps."

No Surprise

Though disturbing, the Commission's findings should not have come as a surprise. The report was only the latest in a long dreary history of such studies. New World Foundation President Colin Greer had written in 1969, "In virtually every study undertaken since that of Chicago schools made in 1898, more children have failed in school than have succeeded, both in absolute and in relative numbers."

A Nation at Risk wasn't even the only such study in 1983. At least five other national reports published that year also found problems with basic education and made recommendations. They came from very prestigious groups: an Education Commission of the States task force, the College Board, a Twentieth Century Fund task force, the Business-Higher Education Forum, and the National Science Board.

Within the next dozen years or so, at least 150 more major reports proposed almost as many different reforms based on as many analyses of the public schools and their problems. As Stephen Arons wrote in 1997, "Reading and analyzing the patterns in these reports can become a terminal preoccupation."

More Testing, Much More Spending

The 1983 report, though, did prompt action as well as generate more reports. For example, *A Nation at Risk* gave further impetus to a movement begun in the 1970s that, by 1993, resulted in 47 states adopting some type of statewide testing program.

It also prompted more spending on education—much, much more spending—the favorite solution of the public school establishment for school problems and a solution largely accepted by the general public and many elected officials. Public educators who praised the report saw they could use it to strengthen their financial pleas. They said in effect, as *Blueprint* magazine's executive editor Tom Mirga has written, give us more money and we will give you better results.

They got the money, but none of the promised gains was achieved.

In the next 15 years, teacher salaries were raised, student-teacher ratios and class sizes were reduced, new facilities were built, and annual spending per pupil, adjusted for inflation, grew by roughly 40 percent, from about $4,700 per school year to $6,600. Total annual expenditures in constant dollars grew nearly 60 percent, from some $180 billion to $280 billion.

Little Progress

The lack of progress was evident 11 years later, when Congress reported the following in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act:

- "The rate of decline in our urban schools is escalating at a rapid pace. Student performance in most inner city schools grows worse each year. At least half of all students entering ninth grade fail to graduate 4 years later and many more students from high-poverty backgrounds leave school with skills that are inadequate for today's workplace ..."
- "An educational emergency exists in those urban and rural areas where there are large concentrations of children who live in poverty."
- "Many elementary and secondary schools in the United States ... are unsuccessful in equipping all students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed as citizens and in the working world."

None of the eight education goals for the year 2000 was achieved and Congress shut down the national goals panel two years later. There was little or nothing to show for almost 20 years of increased effort and expenditures following *A Nation at Risk*.

"If a public institution cannot be reformed in 15 years ... it is fair to conclude that it can't be reformed at all," suggested Mirga.

Writing only a couple of years after *A Nation at Risk*, Fantini had predicted the gains would be meager. He said the charge of mediocrity should be regarded as an indictment of the system and not of those working within it.

"If the system were restructured to contain a greater degree of built-in flexibility, the varied and individual capabilities of teachers could be more fully utilized," he noted. However, resistance by those inside the system to opening it up has been so powerful that flexibility has been slow in coming. Ironically, resistance has come primarily from teachers themselves.

After 20 Years

Twenty years after publication of *A Nation at Risk*, what should have increased—such as achievement and graduation rates—has not, and what should not have increased—such as dropout rates, violence, and functional illiteracy—has.

Expenditures now approach $400 billion a year, and total perhaps as much as five trillion dollars during the past 20 years. Total funding, student-teacher ratios, class sizes, teacher salaries, and additional support staff are better than they have ever been. At the same time, the public school establishment complains more than ever about alleged inadequacies.

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The Lesson of 20 Wasted Years

Without parental choice, inertia thwarts reform

George A. Clowes

When the National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, millions of Americans were shocked to discover they were in the grips of a national crisis because of the poor performance of their public education system.

Now, in 2003, the Hoover Institution's Koret Task Force on K-12 Education has produced a follow-up report with a more shocking message than the first: After 20 years of reforms requiring vastly increased expenditures and effort, the performance of the U.S. public education system remains virtually unchanged.

"In the years since *A Nation at Risk*, the incremental changes that passed for reform have not improved school performance or student achievement," concludes the Task Force in a new book edited by Paul E. Peterson, *Our Schools and Our Future ... Are We Still at Risk?* (Hoover Institution Press, 2003, 378 pages, $15.00 paperback, $25.00 cloth).

The human toll of 20 wasted years is staggering. According to the Task Force, about 80 million first graders "have walked into schools where they have scant chance of learning much more than the youngsters whose plight troubled the Excellence Commission in 1983."

Since 1983, reform efforts have concentrated on adding more resources, more services, and more regulations to schools. But adding resources and trusting the system to change itself "doesn't work," the Task Force reports, because "powerful forces of inertia" underlie the public education establishment. These include the two major teacher unions, school administrators, colleges of education, state education bureaucracies, and school boards.

In a unanimous set of recommendations, the 11 members of the Task Force conclude the lesson of the past 20 years is that "fundamental changes are needed in the incentive structures and power relationships of schooling itself. Those changes are anchored to three core principles: accountability, choice, and transparency."

Accountability means everyone in the education system knows what they must produce in terms of results and how they will be measured, and what will be the consequences of producing or not producing those results.

Choice means "parental decisions rather than bureaucratic regulation should drive the education enterprise." Parents should be free to select from a wide range of educational options for their children.

Transparency means those who seek complete information on how a school or school system is performing relative to other schools should be able to get it easily.

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News.

For more information…

WWW The April 1983 report from the U.S. Department of Education, "A Nation At Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform," is available online at **http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/**

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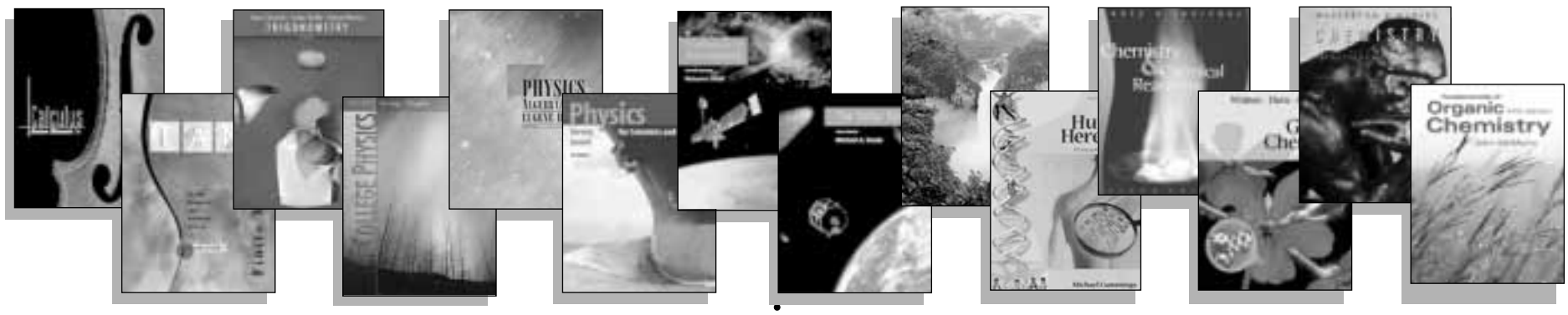

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ability systems that use high-stakes tests can ... be designed to produce credible results that are not distorted by teaching to the test, cheating, or other manipulations of the testing system."

The study, "Testing High Stakes Tests: Can We Believe the Results of Accountability Tests?" by Jay P. Greene Ph.D., Marcus A. Winters, and Greg Forster Ph.D., examined the accuracy of high-stakes tests—tests whose results are used to reward or sanction schools—by comparing students' scores on high-stakes tests with their scores on low-stakes tests. Greene and his colleagues found high- and low-stakes tests produce very similar score levels, suggesting the high-stakes tests are a credible tool for gauging student and school performance.

The researchers examined 5,587 schools in two states, Florida and Virginia, and seven school districts in seven different states. They found a high correlation between average test score levels on the two types of tests and a moderate correlation between high- and low-stakes tests on the gain in test scores from year-to-year. Of the jurisdictions studied, Florida showed the highest correlations, suggesting the Sunshine State's high-stakes tests are highly reliable.

"Teaching to the Test"?

The adoption of high-stakes tests by states and districts for accountability purposes has generated criticism from some educators and researchers. They contend high-stakes tests are an inaccurate gauge of student ability and school quality because the stakes act as an incentive for cheating, teaching-to-the-test, and manipulation of test design to exaggerate student achievement. Teaching-to-the-test, according to these critics, means teaching only the specific knowledge needed to pass the test while failing to teach the broad concepts.

The Manhattan Institute scholars found little evidence to support the critics' position.

"Most of these criticisms fail to withstand scrutiny," they conclude. "Much of the research done in this area has been largely theoretical, anecdotal, or limited to one or another particular state test."

For example, Audrey L. Amrein and David C. Berliner in 2002 criticized high-stakes tests because they found a weak correlation with other tests, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the ACT, and Advanced Placement (AP) tests. But Greene and his colleagues argue that misleading results can be obtained when comparing exams taken by a select group of students—i.e., college entrance and AP exams—to high-stakes exams taken by the general student body. Similarly, comparing grades to test scores produces inaccurate results due to teacher subjectivity and grade inflation.

Educational Nihilism

Some of the criticism of high-stakes testing, Greene and his colleagues point out, is due to a general anti-testing bias and a belief that achievement cannot be measured. The Manhattan authors reject that

notion as "educational nihilism." Instead, they operate on the premise that student achievement is measurable through testing and seek to address whether the stakes in high-stakes testing distort the results of the tests.

To calculate the reliability of a high-stakes test, they compare scores on high-stakes tests to scores from tests that have no stakes, and therefore offer no incentive to manipulate the results. The nine jurisdictions selected for study are places where students are given both high- and low-stakes tests. The low-stakes tests were all nationally recognized standardized tests, while high-stakes tests were state-developed tests.

The study's analysis uses both average scores and measures of year-to-year score gains. Average scores show whether students are meeting the standard, whereas score gains show how much students are learning in a year. Measures of score gains are valuable because they can isolate the impact a school is having on lifting student achievement, regardless of whether students are hitting the standard.

In the nine jurisdictions studied, average scores between high- and low-stakes tests correlated more often than did score gains. The correlations varied considerably among the jurisdictions, with Florida showing the highest correlation between its high- and low-stakes tests. Florida is considered to have one of the most aggressive high-stakes programs for both schools and students:

- Schools that do not have sufficient numbers of students meeting the standard for two out of four years can lose their students to other schools, including private schools, through vouchers.
- Students are also held accountable: Passage of the 3rd grade test is required to go to 4th grade, while passage of the 10th grade test is required for graduation.

Such a tough accountability program could provide an incentive for manipulation of scores on the high-stakes test. However, scores on Florida's high-stakes test nearly match scores on the low-stakes tests. Florida's high correlation shows the stakes in the high-stakes tests do not distort the test results. Teachers are not simply teaching the specific answers to pass the test; rather, they are teaching a broad set of skills and knowledge necessary to pass the FCAT and the Stanford 9, a nationally recognized test.

Although there was some correlation between high- and low-stakes testing in all jurisdictions, not everyone did as well as Florida. The authors suggest low correlation may be due to poor design of the high-stakes test or poor implementation. Differences in material covered by the high- and low-stakes tests could have reduced the correlation. On the score gains measure, lack of data or measurement error could have distorted the correlation.

Krista Kafer is senior policy analyst for education at The Heritage Foundation. Her email address is **krista.kafer@heritage.org**.

For more information…

WWW "Testing High Stakes Tests: Can We Believe the Results of Accountability Tests?" by Jay P. Greene Ph.D., Marcus A. Winters, and Greg Forster Ph.D., is available on the Manhattan Institute's Web site at **http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_33.htm**.

Or use *PolicyBot* at **http://www.heartland.org** to search for document #**11745**.

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School Choice After *Zelman*

A practical guide to legislating "true private choice"

Marie Gryphon

Although the Supreme Court's June 2002 decision in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, holding that school choice is constitutional, sparked strong interest in choice programs across the nation, it did not automatically provide additional educational options to families that might need them. Most importantly, the Court's clarification of the five elements of "true private choice" establishes a set of rules for crafting school choice legislation, providing reformers with a practical guide to expanding educational freedom.

According to Institute for Justice attorney Clint Bolick, the *Zelman* decision opens the door for a revolutionary change in U.S. education.

"It now seems entirely permissible for the government to adopt a program in which all education funding is channeled through students—to public and private schools alike," he said. "The decision could help usher in an era of child-centered public education reform ... focusing less on where children are being educated and more on whether children are being educated."

The Court's five requirements for "true private choice" programs are relatively simple, and are designed to ensure choice is not being used by the government as a tool to promote religion to families or indoctrinate children.

Public Purpose. First, every school choice program must have a secular public purpose: Lawmakers must be acting to improve education, not to promote religion. To avoid any confusion on this point, lawmakers should clearly state their purpose in the enabling legislation that enacts a school choice plan.

Aid Directed to Parents. School choice programs must provide aid to parents—not directly to private schools—if lawmakers want courts to consider the program under their most generous standard.

Drafters may, however, include safeguards to ensure scholarship money is spent on tuition at an approved school. For example, the Ohio program makes checks payable to parents, but mails those checks directly to the alternative schools the parents choose. Parents must then endorse their checks over to the schools in the school offices.

Broad Class of Recipients. Third, school choice programs must be available to a broad class of students not defined on the basis of religion. For example, the Ohio school choice program is available to families on a lottery basis, with low-income families receiving priority. Other programs may be available to all school-age children within a particular jurisdiction.

Neutral Towards Religion. The fourth element of a "true private choice" program is that it be set up in a way that is neutral between religious and nonreligious options. The choices provided to families cannot be "rigged" in a way that favors a religious school. An obvious example of an impermissible program would be one that provided a larger voucher or more generous tax credit to church-affiliated schools than to secular schools.

But there are other ways states might run afoul of the neutrality requirement if lawmakers do not design their programs carefully. For example, it might be constitutionally suspect to model a school choice program on the existing schedule or bureaucratic process of a local parochial system, if the result was disproportionate participation by those schools in a choice program.

To avoid any danger of creating a nonneutral program, lawmakers should be careful to invite representatives from all alternative schools to attend all planning meetings, and create a program that is equally convenient for all.

Adequate Nonreligious Options. Finally, states adopting school choice programs must ensure families have adequate nonreligious educational options from which to choose. These nonreligious options need not be private schools. The Supreme Court considered magnet and charter schools operating in Cleveland as adequate nonreligious options when evaluating Ohio's school choice law.

"[The Supreme] Court's clarification of the five elements of 'true private choice' establishes a set of rules for crafting school choice legislation, providing reformers with a practical guide to expanding educational freedom."

Free to Innovate

Lawmakers have responded quickly to the new certainty about the constitutional rules for school choice. Bills authorizing or expanding school choice programs have been introduced in Colorado, Florida, Maine, Texas, Utah, and elsewhere since the Supreme Court's historic decision.

"The states have finally been freed to innovate," the Cato Institute's David Salisbury said. "That's a good thing. States need to empower families with more options. The cloud of [federal] constitutional doubt has finally been lifted from these programs."

Blaine Amendments

Some legal battles still remain for school choice advocates and opponents. Many state constitutions contain provisions that restrict school choice programs to a greater degree than does the U.S. Constitution.

The two most common types of state restrictions are "Blaine amendments" and "compelled support" provisions. While in a number of states these provisions have not been interpreted in a way that restricts school choice, in other states choice programs have been struck down under state constitutions because of these provisions.

State Blaine amendments directly target any public funding of religiously affiliated educational alternatives. They are named after Maine Representative James Blaine, who led a failed effort in the late 19th century to amend the U.S. Constitution to prohibit school choice that included religious schools. Although his federal effort failed, it inspired many states to amend their own constitutions. Blaine amendments are largely the product of a political backlash during that period against Roman Catholic immigrants.

Compelled Support

Compelled support provisions are more prevalent among older states on the eastern seaboard. They do not directly address education, but generally prohibit laws that would compel state residents to support any church. Direct tax support for religion was common in England and in early America, so these provisions were originally intended to prohibit laws requiring payment of tithes. Opponents of school choice have suggested that programs including religious schools would violate these provisions as well.

At least three court cases—pending in Florida, Maine, and Washington—could resolve these lingering issues once and for all. The Institute for Justice, a public interest law firm specializing in school choice issues, is involved in all three matters. The Washington case challenges that state's Blaine amendment on federal Constitutional grounds, and the Maine case challenges that state's compelled support provision. In Florida, parents and state authorities are appealing a state court's decision that the state's Opportunity Scholarship program violates its Blaine amendment.

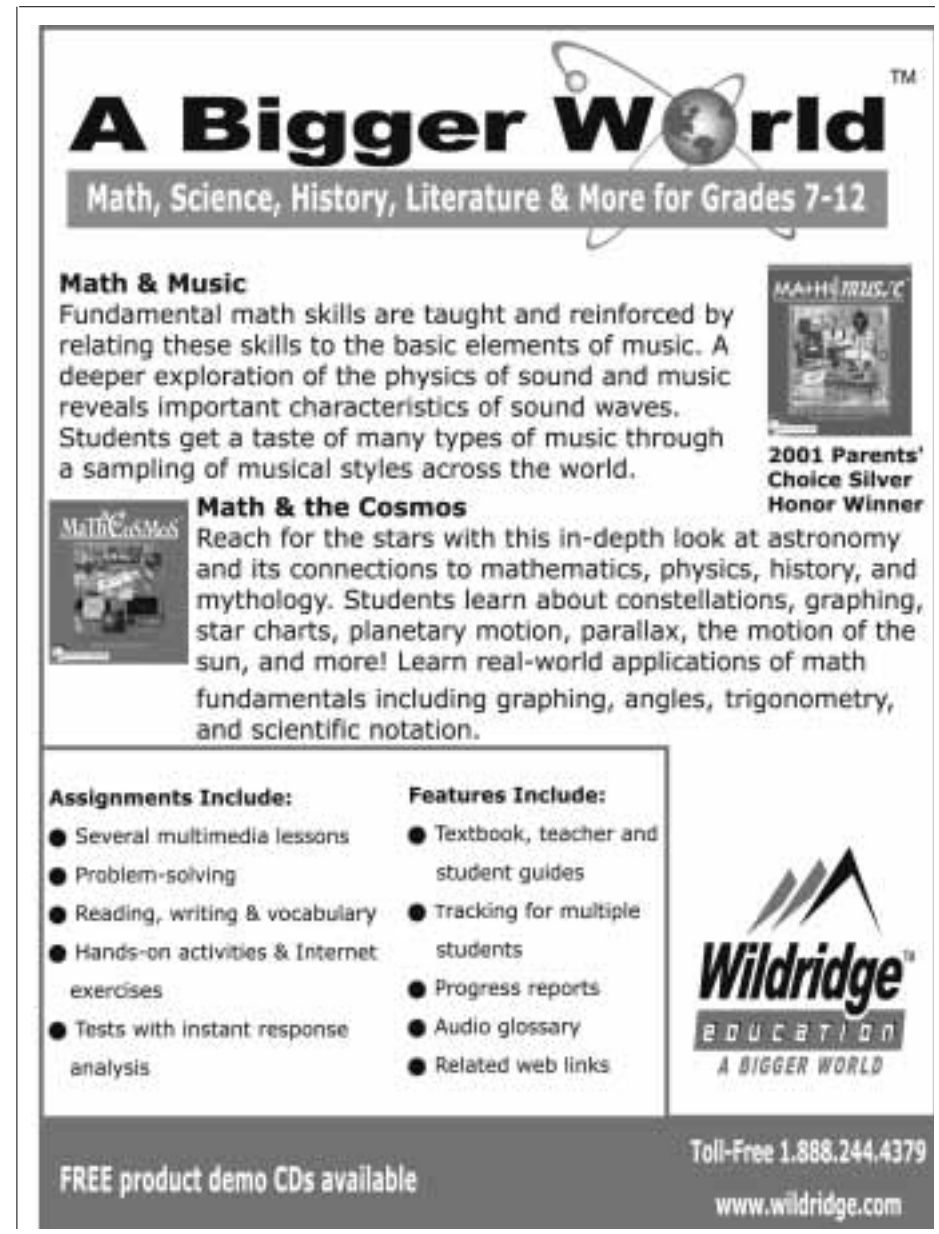
The Institute for Justice has vowed to fight state constitutional provisions wherever they are used to restrict educational options.

"If you've got a school choice program, you've got a lawyer," Bolick proclaims.

Marie E. Gryphon, an attorney, is an education policy analyst with the Cato Institute in Washington, DC. Her email address is **mgryphon@cato.org.**

For more information…

WWW Marie Gryphon's 15-page study, "True Private Choice: A Practical Guide to School Choice after *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*," was published on February 4, 2003 as Cato Policy Analysis No. 466. It is available from the Web site of the Cato Institute at **www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa466.pdf**.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Addressing Black Leadership Concerns

"I think that black leaders are, in fact, very concerned about representing their constituents. They know that their constituents are in the worst schools in our country. They know that those schools aren't getting any better. It's been decades and decades and decades of promises that have not been realized. In the meantime, whole generations of kids are being lost. A lot of black males wind up in prison. ... I think they are very deeply concerned about this.

"And while the older generation has an abiding faith in the government to help solve their problems, government has not solved this problem. And I think it's a short step to recognition that, in this case, choice plans that are controlled by them ... would provide their constituents with new educational options. And if existing leaders won't do that, I think the new younger leaders will."

Terry M. Moe discussing his book Schools, Vouchers and the American Public *at The Brookings Institution, June 7, 2001*

photos: George Clowes

BAEO National Board Members at the 2003 Symposium in Dallas: Cory Booker talks about changing political leadership, and Johnathan Williams describes the founding of The Accelerated School, which was recognized as *Time* magazine's 2001 "School of the Year."

BATTLEFIELD continued from page 1

The battle is not to acquire power for ourselves, emphasized Fuller, but to give "power to the people": the power to choose schools and educational options, the power to direct money to those schools and those options. When people have their own power like that, "they can fight the bureaucracy."

The idea is not simply to replace one bureaucracy with another. "Let me be clear," Fuller said. "Black faces in what used to be high white places does not give us freedom."

Fuller, a former superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools, is a distinguished professor of education at Marquette University, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he founded and currently directs the Institute for the Transformation of Learning.

BAEO is a national, nonprofit membership organization whose mission is to actively support parental choice to empower families and increase educational options for black children. Established in 1999, BAEO announced its formation at the National Press Club on August 24, 2000.

In October 2002, BAEO received a $600,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education to develop a public information campaign to educate parents about their rights and the school choice options in the No Child Left Behind Act. In his opening speech to the symposium, Lawrence Patrick III, president and CEO of BAEO, announced the award of another grant: a $4 million commitment from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to create 15 small alternative high schools over the next five years for students whose needs are not being met by traditional large high schools.

Wide Range of Options

"This money, this grant, has been earmarked for an issue that speaks to the heart of what BAEO represents," said Patrick. "We've been working hard to offer alternatives for low-income parents whose children have been stuck in failing schools. These alternative schools may offer yet another outlet for frustrated parents."

BAEO supports a variety of educational options, including publicly funded vouchers, privately financed scholarships, charter schools, homeschooling, and innovations in traditional public schools. The Gates Foundation has committed more than $31 million to focus attention on smaller schools and create a nationwide network of 168 alternative schools.

"BAEO revolves around a very simple yet powerful idea," explained Patrick in his opening speech, "the idea that every parent—especially low-income, struggling, working class, black parents—should have the right to send their child to a school that works for that child, and that every parent should have access to a wide array of excellent educational options from which to choose."

While "disarmingly simple," this idea is "very threatening to those who are advantaged under the status quo," continued Patrick. "That's why it's a struggle."

Challenging Political Leaders

The struggle is an especially difficult one for black reformers since the school choice battle often involves challenging older black political leaders. The complex nature of this battle was addressed by former Newark, New Jersey city council member Cory Booker in a session on changing political leadership.

Booker described how a new generation of young black leaders, eager to run for political office, often find themselves vigorously opposed not by a white power structure but by an established black organization. While the younger leaders embrace school choice, the older leaders embrace the traditional public school system.

"It's amazing how vitriolic the opposition to school choice is in the black community," said Booker, noting that one black-identified Web site is devoted solely to attacking school choice.

Such attacks on school choice are not going to stop, noted BAEO CEO Patrick. Since becoming head of the Alliance a year ago, his efforts have been devoted to building a strong, permanent organization capable not only of *gaining* ground, but also of *defending* it. During his first year, BAEO membership has increased by 400.

"People say, 'What are you going to do about the children that are left behind?'" said Patrick. "They are against parental choice and against increasing educational options because they don't help everyone.

"My response is: The children who will benefit from educational choice and increased educational options are already being left behind. All the parents who have the means already have exercised choice. They've already left."

BAEO's Symposium 2003, which ran from February 27 to March 2, was held as part of a continuing effort to expand the network of black people committed to the parental choice movement. Attendees included parents, ministers, community leaders, schoolteachers, school founders, and school operators. Workshops at the symposium included sessions on understanding different educational options, the No Child Left Behind Act, chapter organization, facility financing, Bob Moses' Algebra Project, the Piney Woods school, The Accelerated School, and closing the achievement gap.

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News.

For more information…

WWW Information about the Black Alliance for Educational Options and school choice is available from the Alliance's Web site at **http://www.baeo.org**.

"Since becoming head of the Alliance a year ago, [Lawrence Patrick's] efforts have been devoted to building a strong, permanent organization capable not only of *gaining* ground, but also of *defending* it.

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The Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization established in 1996 by Milton and Rose Friedman. The origins of the foundation lie in the Friedmans' long-standing concern about the serious deficiencies in America's elementary and secondary public schools. The best way to improve the quality of education, they believe, is to enable all parents to have a truly free choice of the schools that their children attend. The Friedman Foundation works to build upon this vision, clarify its meaning to the general public, and amplify the national call for true education reform through school choice. Contact us at *www.friedmanfoundation.org* for more information.

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Dad Crusades for Other People's Children

LAURA J. SWARTLEY

Steve Schuck, a prominent real estate developer in Colorado, has been a fervent crusader for school choice for almost two decades ... but neither he, nor his family, nor his associates stand to benefit directly from parental choice becoming more widespread in the Centennial State. His three children, Bill, Tom and Ann, are already grown—one is teaching in a public school, one is running the real estate business, and the third is a professional wild animal rehabilitator. Schuck's five grandchildren are all in good schools chosen by their parents.

Schuck's overall motivation to crusade for school choice grows from a synergy of common sense and compassion. The businessman in him sees school choice as sound public policy. The father in him sees the desperation of poor parents seeking a better education for their children. And the philanthropist in him believes he can make a difference.

Steve Schuck with Milton and Rose Friedman

Not only Colorado but the nation as a whole stands to benefit from school choice becoming a reality for all children, argues Schuck. His single-minded dedication to the issue began in 1986 when he ran for governor of Colorado on the Republican ticket.

"Milton and Rose [Friedman]'s brilliant idea for vouchers appealed to me 30 or 40 years ago, in a very left-brain sort of way," Schuck explains. "But, when I ran for governor, my orientation quickly shifted from the pragmatic to the personal—to a very right-brain approach, if you will.

"As a candidate, I was meeting these extraordinary families whose worlds had been cruel and devoid of opportunity because of the institutional nature—as opposed to a child-centered approach—of the public schools available to them. It became my primary objective to fix this wrong. After all, not only were these people missing out on all the richness of the American dream, all of my constituents and all of America were missing out on the possible contributions they could make with the equal chance to succeed."

Schuck lost the governor's nomination by fewer than 3,000 votes, but his passion for school choice stuck with him. Since 1986, he has worked tirelessly to pass meaningful school choice legislation in his state. This year, there are good prospects for passage of a voucher bill, thanks to his efforts and those of other philanthropists.

Schuck and his wife fund a private scholarship program in Colorado Springs, which grants $2,500 private school vouchers and $500 public school and tutoring vouchers for low-income families. He also works closely with former Congressman Bob Schaffer of the Colorado Alliance for Reform in Education (CARE). CARE is a nonprofit group that publishes newsletters and organizes information sessions to communicate the need for school choice in Colorado, with outreach to Hispanic and African-American communities. Its companion organization, Parents Alliance for Choice in Education (PACE), gets more into the political forum with regard to promoting school choice.

Schuck's reason for being politically involved even when he doesn't have to be is summed up in the "give-back" philosophy he laid out in his corporate biography: "Everyone will benefit when executives bring their years of successful enterprise in the competitive marketplace to the processes by which we govern ourselves. When their talents are applied to societal challenges the results will be far more responsive and responsible from both the private and public sectors."

He emphasizes he is neither pro-private school nor anti-public school. Every American is entitled to the chance of getting a good education, he says, no matter how that good education is achieved.

"I'm pro-GOOD education," he explains. But as a businessman, what is maddening to him is that he knows a voucher program would cost less per-pupil than the public school model.

"Rather than grant people the $5,000 to $6,000 it takes to buy a good education, we choose to spend more and condemn many kids to a life of despair," he says. "Now, where's the sense in that?"

One might also ask, where's the compassion?

Laura J. Swartley is communications director with the Milton and Rose Friedman Foundation in Indianapolis, Indiana. Her email address is **laura@friedmanfoundation.org.**

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The Friedman Report

CONTINUED

School Choice Roundup

George A. Clowes

ARIZONA

"No" to Tax Credit Expansion

Three bills that would have expanded Arizona's education tax credit failed to pass the Senate Education Committee on February 17. The bills were opposed by the Arizona School Boards Association, whose spokesperson Janice Palmer said lawmakers should not be considering more tax credits—which currently lower state revenues by $28 million—when budget woes threaten more than $100 million in public education funding.

Sponsored by Sen. Dean Martin (R-Phoenix) and with a projected cost of $15 million a year, Senate Bill 1355 would have created a $250 tax credit to reimburse teachers for out-of-pocket expenses incurred in purchasing classroom supplies. Senate Bills 1237 and 1306 would have allowed public schools to use tax credit money for classroom instruction costs or reading programs instead of just extracurricular activities.

Arizona Republic
February 18, 2003

The Genius of Competition

"Milwaukee has had a voucher program since 1990. When it was debated on Wisconsin's State House floor, opponents said choice would empty the public schools and destroy them ...

"Many studies have documented increased achievement for those students who have opted out of public schools in Milwaukee and Cleveland. But now we have more meaningful data: Students who remain in their public schools have also benefitted from vouchers. Yes, the genius of competition works.

"[I]n these rough economic times, it makes sense for Colorado legislators to consider choice. Both Milwaukee and Cleveland programs spend fewer tax dollars on children in choice schools than on those who remain in their public schools. If some students can get better education in a choice school, doing so at less cost to taxpayers, then why shouldn't Colorado embrace choice?"

Steve Schuck
The Denver Post
February 8, 2003

COLORADO

Voucher Bills Advance

This year's session of the Colorado Legislature has produced five school choice bills, three for vouchers and two for tax credits.

Two of the three voucher bills won approval in their respective chambers on February 19. Both bills would permit parents to choose a private school—secular or religious—for the education of their child, with publicly funded vouchers following the child to the school. One garnered unexpected support from the state's highest-ranking Democrat, Attorney General Ken Salazar.

In the Senate, lawmakers gave preliminary approval to an opt-in voucher plan sponsored by Sen. John Evans (R-Parker). Evans' bill would allow either the school board or district voters to approve the implementation of a voucher program in their district. The vouchers would be worth up to $4,200 a year.

"Nothing could be worse than children trapped in a system where they do not have choice," Evans told the *Rocky Mountain News*.

In the House, lawmakers approved a pilot voucher plan sponsored by Rep. Nancy Spence (R-Aurora), chairwoman of the House Education Committee. The plan, which would be capped at 500 students per district, would apply only to districts where the state has rated more than eight schools "low" or "unsatisfactory" and only to low-income children who had failing scores on the Colorado Student Assessment Program test. Vouchers would be worth 85 percent of the district's per-student operating revenue.

"If you want to talk about something that will really improve education without hurting the public schools, it's this bill," House Speaker Lola Spradley (R-Beulah) told the *Rocky Mountain News*. The bill won support from unexpected quarters—both from Attorney General Salazar and from the Colorado Children's Campaign, an advocacy group that hitherto has opposed vouchers.

"I think that it's important for us to continue to look at what we can do to help the poorest of our kids," Salazar said in a memo to people who had accompanied him on a fact-finding tour of Milwaukee in January. "I think we ought not to shy away from innovation and experimentation."

Rocky Mountain News
February 20, 2003
February 22, 2003

FLORIDA

Tax Credit Cap May Be Raised

Thousands of mostly black, low-income students in Florida have used scholarships worth up to $3,500 to transfer from public schools to private schools during the past year. Another 20,000 students are on a waiting list to get scholarships, but the supply is limited because of a $50 million statewide cap on the tax credits used to fund the program. A proposal to raise the cap to $100 million is expected to be introduced in the current legislative session.

The program, authored by Rep. Joe Negron (R-Stuart) in 2000, allows companies to direct up to 75 percent of their taxes to organizations that provide scholarships to children who qualify for the federal free and reduced price lunch program. Parents find a school for their child and then apply for a scholarship. Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade counties are home to more than 5,000 scholarship students.

But Rep. James Harper Jr. (D-West Palm Beach) argues students would stay in public schools if the scholarship funds were used to improve those schools. Any additional tax credit money should go "to ensure adequate funding in public schools," he told the *Sun-Sentinel*.

Negron pointed out that the idea of the scholarships is "to allow low-income parents to select alternatives to public education." He noted the state already is spending $12 billion a year on the public schools. Another $50 million would increase that by just 0.4 percent.

South Florida Sun-Sentinel
February 13, 2003

ILLINOIS

New Legislature Takes Aim at Choice

When a bill to hobble Illinois charter schools was introduced in last year's lame-duck legislative session, the proposal died because Senate President James "Pate" Philip (R-DuPage) refused to allow a vote on it.

Now, in this year's new legislature, new Senate President Emil Jones (D-Chicago) has resurrected the measure as his own Senate Bill 19.

While the intent of SB 19 is to restore some bargaining powers to the Chicago Teachers Union in exchange for lifting the cap on Chicago charter schools from 15 to 20, the bill has several other provisions that would restrict charter school operations. The measure would:

- require all new Chicago charter schools to be contained on a single campus;
- impose a 30-month moratorium on Chicago charter schools engaging the services of for-profit management companies, i.e., during the critical start-up period;
- require that 75 percent of teachers in Chicago charter schools, and 50 percent of teachers in new charter schools outside Chicago, be certified; and
- require Chicago charter schools to administer not only state achievement tests but also any other tests administered in the Chicago Public Schools.

Two bills attacking the state's Education Expense Tax Credit Law were introduced in February. One would eliminate the tax credit entirely while the other, House Bill 1120, would limit the tax credit to families near the poverty level, which would take the benefit away from most of the families who can use it now. Introduced by Rep. Michael Smith (D-Canton) and now assigned to the Executive Committee, HB 1120 has generated at least one opponent from Smith's own party.

"The Education Expense Tax Credit is an important

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benefit to families choosing the best educational opportunities for their children, and it should not be so greatly restricted," said Rep. Robert S. Molaro (D-21st District).

Illinois Charter School Facs
February 3, 2002
Illinois Family Institute
February 6, 2003

LOUISIANA

Voucher Proposal Prompts Opposition

In early February, Republican Governor Mike Foster announced two major education proposals: a takeover plan for the state's failing schools and a small pilot school voucher program. The takeover proposal would permit state school board officials to appoint universities or private firms to run the schools. The pilot voucher proposal would give the parents of a few hundred students in a few failing public schools the option of sending their child—and the child's state education dollars—to a private school.

Catholic school leaders also have outlined a proposal that calls for parents of children in failing elementary schools to receive $3,000 vouchers if they choose a private school for their child. While Foster's proposal requires voucher students to take the LEAP test—the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program—Catholic school officials oppose that requirement.

Pat Bassett, president of the National Association of Independent Schools, raised some other concerns about specific voucher programs in a February 7 speech in New Orleans to about 1,000 private school teachers.

"The reason our schools prevail ... is that we are mission-driven organizations," Bassett told the educators. "And our mission is to educate whatever population you define as your population, whether it's college-bound or whatever, learning disabled."

Bassett said his organization agreed with the principle underlying school vouchers, i.e., allowing education tax dollars to follow children to nonpublic schools. However, he warned specific voucher programs often require a school to accept any student who applies, thus undermining the school's ability to shape its student body.

"And that means you give up the single freedom that we have—the freedom to accept students who are mission-appropriate," said Bassett. Instead of a voucher plan, he said his organization would support a tax credit program.

Times-Picayune
February 4, 2003
February 8, 2003
February 21, 2003

MAINE

Call for State to Accept Supreme Court Ruling

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled last June that it was constitutional for parents to choose to send their tax dollars to religious schools as one of the options in a school choice program. However, Maine Attorney General Steven Rowe argues the ruling doesn't mean states are required to include religious schools in those options. Consequently, he is continuing to enforce a state law that bars parents from choosing religious schools in Maine's school voucher program. School choice advocates are seeking to void the prohibition.

In areas of the Pine Tree State without their own public schools, a long-standing voucher program has allowed parents to choose their child's school and have the education tax dollars for that child follow the child to the school of choice, whether it was public or private, secular or religious. Then in 1981, a new state law was approved to bar voucher funds from following a child to a religious school.

CHAMPIONS of CHOICE

Louisiana Governor Mike Foster

Foster announced two major education proposals: a takeover plan for the state's failing schools and a small pilot school voucher program.

Texas Governor Rick Perry

Perry advocated giving vouchers to parents whose children attend a low-performing public school in the state.

For more information...

WWW A recent study by the Milton and Rose Friedman Foundation found the school choice program in Maine results in improved student academic performance at a significant savings to taxpayers: **www.friedmanfoundation.org/news/2002-02-05.html**.

Institute for Justice attorney Clark Neily argues states can no longer exclude religious schools from choice programs without good reason.

"Any time government makes a distinction among viewpoints or races and freedom of expression, it has to have what the court calls a compelling interest in making that distinction," Neily said. The Institute, along with the American Center for Law and Justice, is representing eight families in a lawsuit filed last fall to overturn the state law, which they regard as religious discrimination.

In February, Rep Kevin Glynn (R-South Portland) took a more direct approach and filed a bill to erase the 1981 law and "end discrimination against religious schools." The bill received a public hearing before the legislature's Education and Cultural Affairs Committee on February 11.

Kennebec Journal
February 11, 2003

MASSACHUSETTS

School Choice Has Long History

Vouchers date back to the early days of the Massachusetts colony, when taxes were imposed to pay for a Protestant minister to educate the plantation's children—but those in other sects could apply their tax dollars to pay for their own clergy, notes Boston corporate lawyer and school choice advocate Cornelius Chapman. But in the 1850s, the xenophobic "Know-Nothings" were successful in adding an amendment to the state constitution that barred public funds from going to religious institutions, a provision now under challenge in the courts.

Vouchers are needed now because minority and low-income children have few options if their public school fails them, said Chapman.

"I saw that people in good school systems had little control," he told the *Boston Globe*. "If it's bad for them, how much worse must it be for people who can't buy a new house or put their child in private school?"

Chapman serves on the board of two charter schools and is founder of both the Coalition for Parental Choice in Education and the Give a Child a Choice scholarship program. He points out choice is a part of other government programs, such as Medicaid and Medicare, and should be a part of public education, too.

"We give people great purchasing power over the various aspects of their lives aside from K-12 education," he said. "The existence of a government-funded program that would put purchasing power in the hands of the consumer makes the system better."

If the court case gives the green light to vouchers again in the Bay State, that would please retired State Senator Bill Owens. His early support of vouchers in the 1960s was muted when choice opponents persuaded him it would harm the public schools. Now, having seen little improvement in the public schools, Owens is again a voucher advocate.

Boston Globe
February 17, 2003

NEW YORK

Tax Incentives Act Introduced

A broad coalition of New York Republicans and Democrats has sponsored the Educational Tax Incentives Act, a legislative proposal that would allow tax credits for certain educational donations. Introduced in both the Senate (S.1665) and Assembly (A.3590), the bill would permit a 50 percent tax credit for contributions to school tuition organizations, local education funds, or public school entities such as school districts and individual schools, including charter schools.

On personal income tax returns the credit would be capped at $250 for a $500 donation; corporate income taxpayers could contribute up to $50,000 for a $25,000 credit. Contributions for the benefit of a designated student would not be eligible for the credit. Taxpayers who homeschool their children would be eligible for a credit for the purchase of instructional materials.

Based on the Arizona tax credit experience, it has been projected that 75 percent of donations under the New York proposal would go to support public education. Since the measure generates $2 in donations for every $1 in tax credits, a 3:1 public school:private school donation ratio would generate 50 percent more money for public schools than would be lost to the state treasury.

United New Yorkers for Choice in Education
February 27, 2003

FRIEDMAN continued on page 12

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Engaging Parents in the Education of Their Children

"The debate raging in our state over the funding of our children's education often ignores a vital constituency: the parents. ... Parents have little say in the school their children attend, what curriculum they're taught, who their teacher is, or what values are presented. ...

"One principle that both advocates and opponents of Tuition Tax Credits agree on is that parental involvement is a key to student achievement. But when a system leaves parents without control, many resign themselves to being passive observers rather than active participants. By empowering parents to be real consumers, we engage parents in a meaningful way in the education of their children. ...

"Previously helpless parents who see their child's future slipping away will now be able to take action to find the school that best fits their child's needs. ...

"Furthermore, the Utah proposal is fiscally responsible by establishing a lower cost alternative for Utah's funding of education."

Jordan Clements
Salt Lake Tribune
February 18, 2003

FRIEDMAN continued from page 11

TEXAS

Governor Advocates Vouchers

In his State of the State address to a joint session of the Texas legislature on February 11, Republican Governor Rick Perry advocated giving vouchers to parents whose children attend a low-performing public school in the state. He also proposed the Education Freedom Plan, which would give high-performing districts more control over their spending.

"Let's allow parents of children stuck in sub-standard schools to choose the best school for their child—whether that school is public, private or religious," said the governor. "I know in this chamber there are Republicans and Democrats willing to take this step. They know what I know: When you give parents a choice, you give children a chance."

One Democrat willing to take that step is Rep. Ron Wilson (D-Houston). Even before Perry's speech, the long-time voucher advocate had filed a bill to establish pilot voucher programs in six of the state's urban school districts. The vouchers could be used at public or private schools.

But Rep. Jose Mendendez, a Democrat from San Antonio, said voucher opponents in the House "will die on this issue" and do whatever is necessary to defeat school choice legislation. Such pledges were welcomed by about 200 teachers and parents from the Edgewood school district in San Antonio, who travelled to Austin on February 19 to lobby lawmakers against supporting Wilson's bill.

Edgewood is home to one of the largest privately financed voucher programs in the nation, with about 1,600 voucher students who have transferred from public to private schools. Those students represent a loss of $4 million in state aid to the district, complained Edgewood Superintendent Luis Gonzalez.

Austin TV News 8
February 11, 2003
Dallas Morning News
February 20, 2003

UTAH

Tax Credits in Reform Bill

On February 4, a 20-8 vote by the Utah Senate secured veto-proof approval of SB 34, a tax credit bill sponsored by Sen. Chris Buttars (R-West Jordan). SB 34 would provide parents with a state income tax credit of $2,132* per child for private school tuition; it also would allow individuals and businesses the same amount of credit for donations to private school scholarship organizations.

At the end of a February 19 meeting of the Senate Education Committee, Buttars won approval from the Committee to merge his bill with a $30 million omnibus education reform bill, SB 154. Five days later, a 15-14 vote of approval from the full Senate sent the amended bill to the House for further consideration.

In addition to providing for tax credits, the reform bill SB 154 revises the duties of the state Board of Education, changes the makeup of the nominating committee for state board candidates, alters graduation requirements, and makes modifications to the state Board of Regents. Many of the provisions in SB 154 come from recommendations made by the Employers' Education Coalition, whose members said the reforms would streamline management, improve accountability, and produce higher-quality graduates.

"It's time to consider the customer: the employers," testified Tom Bingham of the Utah Manufacturers Association.

By contrast, "opponents of the bill said they disagreed with its emphasis on a businesslike approach to managing the education system," according to *Salt Lake Tribune* reporter Ronnie Lynn.

The House already has had some debate on tax credits. On February 11, representatives voted 41-32 to approve placing a non-binding referendum on the November 2004 ballot, asking voters the question: "Should Utah's public tax dollars or potential tax dollars be used to fund private education through the use of a tuition tax credit?"

Salt Lake Tribune
February 5, 2003; February 12, 2003
February 20, 2003; February 25, 2003

* In the March 2003 issue of *School Reform News*, this figure was incorrectly reported as $3,132.

VERMONT

Bill Addresses "Compelled Support"

One way to broaden the range of educational choices available to parents is to support organizations that award scholarships to help families pay tuition at public or private schools. A measure to encourage such support was recently introduced in the Vermont House as H. 198.

Sponsored by 14 representatives, including House Education Committee Chairman Rep. Howard Crawford (R-Burke), H. 198 would authorize a non-refundable tax credit of 50 percent of a donation made to a private scholarship organization by an individual taxpayer or a corporation.

Another measure would address the issue of "compelled support" of religion in Vermont. This issue arises out of a situation where parents in the town of Chittenden wanted the state's voucher program—called "tuitioning" and operated in towns without schools of their own—to pay for tuition at a religious school. The state refused, and the state supreme court agreed, saying the state's constitution was even more restrictive than the federal one on church-state issues. This means even last year's U.S. Supreme Court ruling in favor of vouchers does not change things in Vermont.

Under the proposed bill, tuitioning to religious schools would be permitted, but those townspeople who considered this to be "compelled support" of religion would get a refund of the proportionate share of their tax dollars used to support education of tuitioned students at religious schools.

Open Enrollment Proposed

In the Senate, open enrollment was proposed as a means of expanding public school choice. Senators Hull Maynard (R-Rutland), Kevin Mullin (R-Rutland), and Mark Shepard (R-Bennington) sponsored S. 121, which would allow parents to send their children to "any Vermont public school." The bill calls for the school "of residence" to pay 90 percent of the general state support grant to the chosen school district.

Vermont Education Report
February 17, 2003
February 24, 2003

WASHINGTON

Promising Start for Charter Legislation

On February 19, the Evergreen State's Senate Ways and Means Committee approved Substitute Senate Bill 5012, a measure to authorize charter schools in Washington. The committee's action sent the bill to the Senate Rules Committee, which is expected to send the measure to the Senate floor for debate.

If the bill is approved in the Senate, it would go to the House of Representatives, where House Speaker Frank Chopp (D-Seattle) and House Education Chair Dave Quall (D-Mount Vernon) are strong charter school supporters.

Legislation authorizing charter schools has been approved by the state House on four earlier occasions, in 1995, 1996, 1997, and 1998. In 2000, a charter bill made it to the House Rules Committee but was allowed to die there after then-Senate Education Committee Chair Rosemary McAuliffe (D-Bothell) announced she would not give the bill a hearing in her committee and would treat it as "dead on arrival."

Education Excellence Coalition
February 20, 2003

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WISCONSIN

Mayor Proposes Vouchers for All

Milwaukee's voucher program should be expanded to cover all city children, according to Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist. Adding middle-income families to the school choice movement would help keep them in the city as well as helping lock in the benefits of school choice for the poor. Means-tested programs are less secure politically than are universal programs that include families from all income ranges, argued Norquist in a recent op-ed in the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*.

"I would never support a course of action solely because it does something for the middle class," said Norquist, but he pointed out cities need to retain and attract middle-income families to be successful.

"Reasonable property tax rates; donations to organizations that serve the poor; contributions to church and synagogue and mosque and temple; support for cultural and civic causes—all depend on a large, committed middle class, black and Hispanic and white, that lives in the city, owns homes in the city and invests in the city," explained the mayor.

Expanded school choice already had brought the following benefits to the city's public school system, wrote Norquist:

- The teacher union agreed to a new program to "counsel out" problem teachers.
- Individual schools now have greater responsibility for teacher hiring, school budgeting, and curriculum.
- Specialty programs, such as Montessori programs, that historically were always oversubscribed, have been expanded.
- The number of neighborhood schools that students can walk to has increased.
- Full-day kindergarten has been adopted in some schools.
- Expanded before- and after-school child care are available in some schools.
- A record number of charter schools has been approved.

The Milwaukee story proves critics are wrong when they claim vouchers hurt public schools, said Norquist.

Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel
February 6, 2003

Expansion Reveals Legal Tangle

The growth of Milwaukee's school choice programs has produced some unexpected outcomes regarding the eligibility of various students under the provisions of different school choice laws.

A case in point is with the Woodlands School, a highly regarded private school in Milwaukee serving a diverse body of about 200 preschool through eighth grade students from the city and the suburbs. About half of Woodlands' students enroll through the city's voucher program. Recently, largely for financial reasons, Woodlands applied to become a charter school.

As a charter school under the auspices of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Woodlands would receive about $7,000 for each eligible student, regardless of family income. But which students are eligible?

According to state law, the school's current voucher students in fourth grade and up would be allowed to attend a Woodlands charter school—but the school would receive no money for them for at least the first year, nor would it be able to charge their parents tuition.

Suburban students currently attending Woodlands would be even worse off because state law doesn't allow them to attend a university-sponsored charter school in Milwaukee. However, if the Woodlands charter were sponsored by the City of Milwaukee, students from the suburbs could attend and the school would receive state funds for them.

"We are going to work out all these issues because we have to," Woodlands principal Maureen Sullivan told the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*. "The kids are counting on us, and the parents are counting on us."

Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel
February 12, 2003

Virtual Tour of Milwaukee

For those interested in learning more about the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, the Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation in Indianapolis, Indiana now offers a redesigned version of its Virtual Milwaukee Tour at **www.geofoundation.org.**

The tour, which features photographs and audio from GEO's regular fact-finding trips to Milwaukee, gives insight into what parents, principals, community activists, elected officials, public school officials, and voucher opponents have to say about school choice in Milwaukee.

"After 13 years, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program can no longer be called an experiment," said GEO President Kevin Teasley, noting it is the nation's oldest targeted voucher program. The program serves more than 10,000 students in more than 100 private or parochial schools. The program offers low-income Milwaukee families up to $6,000 per child to attend the school of their choice. Research shows not only voucher students are benefitting from the program; students remaining in Milwaukee's public schools benefit as well.

GEO Electronic News
February 10, 2003

Hillsdale College Announces the Seventh Recipient of the $25,000

Henry Salvatori Prize For "Excellence in Teaching"

Each fall, Hillsdale College seeks nominations for the Henry Salvatori Prize for "Excellence in Teaching." This prize honors teachers in grades K-12 who are committed to rigorous standards and to a traditional, time-tested approach to education. Endowed by the late businessman and philanthropist Henry Salvatori, this competition is open to teachers in non-profit private and public schools who have employed the *Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide*. Winners receive a $25,000 cash award payable to their school.

Mr. Micah Porter, of D' Evelyn Junior/Senior High School in Denver, Colorado, is hereby named the recipient of the 2002 Henry Salvatori Prize for "Excellence in Teaching."

The *Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide* is an invaluable resource for teachers, administrators and parents who seek to educate their children in a well-balanced core of essential subjects. Based on the daily operation of Hillsdale Academy, the K-12 model school of Hillsdale College, the *Guide* contains information on curricula, supplementary reading, school culture, and parent and faculty handbooks. It is already in use at over 400 schools in all 50 states nationwide, as well as by countless home-schooling parents.

To learn more about the Henry Salvatori Prize for "Excellence in Teaching" or the *Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide*, call 1-800-989-7323 or log on to www.hillsdale.edu/academy.

Hillsdale Academy — Virtus et Sapientia

Hillsdale COLLEGE

"The *Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide* provides a clear vision that is true and timeless. By adhering to high standards such as those championed in the *Reference Guide*, D'Evelyn has proven to be the most successful public school in the state of Colorado."

Mr. Micah Porter
D'Evelyn Junior/Senior High School, Denver, Colorado
2002 Recipient of the Henry Salvatori Prize for "Excellence in Teaching"

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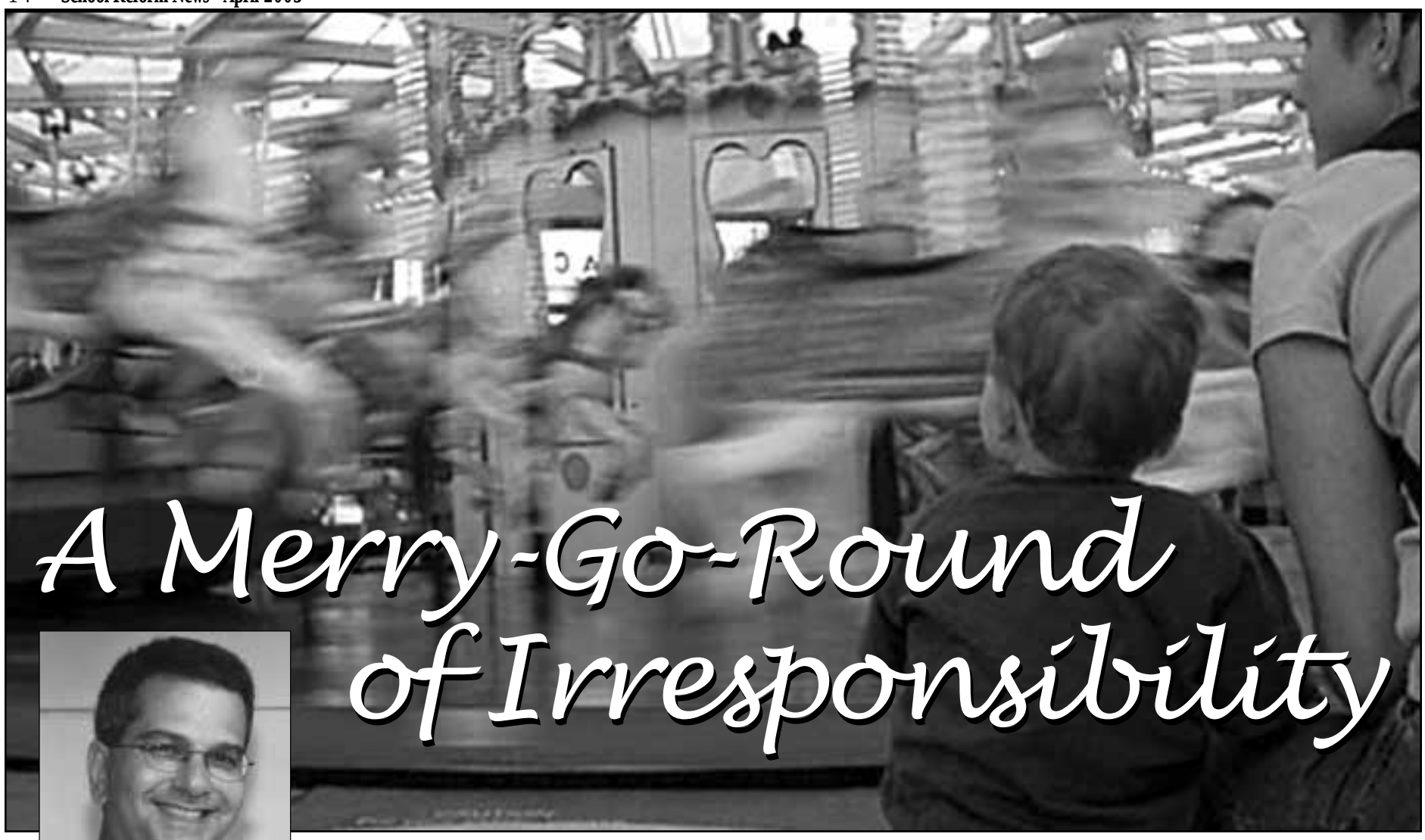

A Merry-Go-Round of Irresponsibility

an interview with Paul D. Novack

by George A. Clowes

Although active community service is a tradition in his family, Paul D. Novack is setting the bar at a whole new level as a leader in local government, a humanitarian, an educator, and a reformer. Novack is the mayor of Surfside, Florida, an oceanfront town of 4,500 nestled between Miami Beach and Bal Harbour. His father served in the town's volunteer fire department and his mother served both as a public official and as an officer in numerous civic organizations.

Novack, too, has served in many civic groups, and he is a volunteer member of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. He also sponsors several community projects and acts as pro bono counsel for a number of synagogues, churches, and community organizations. As a volunteer, he personally led emergency relief delivery teams into Haiti and organized disaster relief for Honduras and the Dominican Republic. These and other efforts, including building support for democratic systems, have earned him numerous awards, including recognition as "Humanitarian of the Year" in 1995.

Following his persistent efforts to improve school safety and accountability both locally and across the state, Novack was recently appointed to the newly formed State Oversight Board for the Miami-Dade County Public School District. He has been active in the district for many years as a volunteer speech and debate teacher as well as serving on various school committees and founding an innovative after-school recreation program. He has received numerous awards from local schools, including being named "School Volunteer of the Year" in 2000.

Now in his sixth term as mayor, Novack believes in the importance of getting the best value for taxpayers' dollars, while at the same time not shirking responsibility for making substantial investments in public safety, infrastructure maintenance, and facility renovation. Although Surfside's service levels have been upgraded substantially during his administration, the town's property tax rate has not been increased.

A graduate of the University of Miami, Novack also earned a J.D. from Nova Southeastern University College of Law, where he served as an editor of the law review. He is married, with two children. He recently spoke with *School Reform News* Managing Editor George Clowes.

***CLOWES**: How did you become involved in school safety?*

NOVACK: I have children in our public schools here in Miami-Dade County. I also went to them myself, and I've always been very concerned about our public school system because I recognize how vitally important it is, not only for students and educators but for the entire community. The state of our public school system has a great impact on many things all of our communities face—obviously education of children but also economic development, public safety, fiscal responsibility, and the use of public funds.

In November 1999, I was invited to serve as Principal-for-a-Day at Miami Beach Senior High School, which is my alma mater. I saw there were many great things happening at the school. The problem I saw, though, was that the students and teachers there were achieving excellence despite their facilities. I saw a daily struggle to overcome the obstacles placed in the way of an educational program by a grossly deficient educational facility.

I also saw things that appeared to be unsafe, and so I commenced an investigation into the condition of the school. The more I learned, the more disturbed I became because not only were there a vast number of safety and structural deficiencies in the building, but these defects had been documented and reported to the district annually for more than a decade. Over time, the school had become an accumulation of facility defects, fire hazards, and neglect that grew worse and more threatening every year.

For example, inspection reports listed dozens of pages of "life-threatening issues": some of the drapes were made of flammable material; some ceiling tiles were combustible; there were no fire extinguishers or fire blankets; exit gates were padlocked. One of the most disturbing things of all was that there were no working fire alarms. Throughout the campus, there were hundreds of fire alarm pull stations in student areas but not a single one was operational. Even worse, the back-up alarm system did not work any better.

I brought in engineers and inspectors, and the more we looked at it, the worse it got. Not only were the children under some degree of threat every day, but also there was a severe degree of irresponsibility on the part of public school officials. It quickly became clear the school was beyond repair and so I suggested a two-track approach, which was to make emergency repairs to eliminate the life-threatening aspects of the code violations, and then move on to plan and build a new school. Over the next few years, the school system spent millions of dollars on studies, reviews, and attempts to avoid addressing the problem, only to eventually reach the same conclusion.

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At first, the district denied there was a problem. Then they admitted a few problems. That transitioned into a need for major repairs, which eventually brought a concession that it would cost more to do the repairs than to build a new school. But at each stage of this merry-go-round, the district would go through a planning and design process involving payments to outside consultants, architects, engineers, and inspectors. After that, they began the process of designing and building a new school, which I found was yet another merry-go-round.

I have found many patterns within the policies and practices of the Miami-Dade public school district that indicate an inefficient and neglectful system. The patterns are what are very distressing. You're always going to find problems with major construction programs, but when you see the same deficiencies occur over and over again with no attempt at correction, then the level of concern with the district grows and grows.

***CLOWES**: So there is no incentive to make construction and maintenance more efficient?*

NOVACK: That's right. In fact, the system seems intentionally designed to perpetuate the same mistakes over and over again. For example, we recently discovered serious water intrusion defects in the district's brand new schools. These are the same problems the district has encountered with other new schools built over the past decade. But instead of recognizing a problem in a construction project and then making sure it didn't happen again, the school system has ignored them.

The way state law was written when I came into this issue was that fire marshals could do an inspection at a school, but they could not require any corrective action. Public schools were specifically excluded from the authority of fire marshals and fire chiefs throughout the state of Florida. If the violations found at Beach High had been found in an unoccupied warehouse, the fire marshals could have ordered it closed until repaired. They couldn't do that with a public school.

Unfortunately, in situations like this where jurisdiction is unclear, many people in government prefer to say, "It's not my job." They don't want the responsibility or the accountability. Then the ball gets fumbled and nobody picks it up. Nobody wants it.

***CLOWES**: That was clearly the case at Miami Beach High.*

NOVACK: Well, not just at Beach High. That's where it really started to get disturbing. Since what was happening at that campus was such a blatant breach of responsibility, I started researching the annual fire safety inspection records for other schools within our district. I found school after school with life-threatening hazards that had been documented and then systematically ignored for years.

Then I found there were similar problems in other counties in Florida. That's when I tried to get the state legislature to recognize that the present system had no checks and balances. The public school districts were an entity unto themselves, who could not be forced to correct fire safety problems. There was a complete absence of accountability throughout fire safety and construction issues.

Over a two-year period, the state legislature came to realize what was happening and changed the law last year. Now, fire marshals throughout the state are empowered not only to inspect schools annually but to order compliance. If a public school district fails to correct any life-threatening hazard, the fire marshal now has the authority to close the school down.

***CLOWES**: You would normally expect the school board to respond to issues like this.*

NOVACK: That's what I expected. I expected the school board to mobilize personnel and resources and to send the cavalry out to these schools to fix fire alarm systems, to open emergency exits, to do whatever it had to do. I was shocked to see them do just the opposite. Their solution at Miami Beach

> *"[W]hen you see the same deficiencies occur over and over again with no attempt at correction, then the level of concern with the district grows and grows."*

High was to send in painters to replace the inoperable fire alarm pull boxes with switch plates and paint them over to look like an abandoned switch plate. I have photographs of every step of that process, from the broken pull box all the way to the new switch plate.

Then they claimed they didn't need pull boxes under their interpretation of the code. I pleaded with them: "Don't wait for a disaster." At one point, I was told not to worry because "Beach High is next to a fire station."

Because of the new law and the spotlight we had focused on the Miami-Dade schools, the district has now made a lot of repairs. We're stuck with some old buildings that wouldn't meet modern code, and a recent survey found many violations still exist, but at least now we don't have nearly as egregious a situation as we had before.

***CLOWES**: You mentioned problems with new construction, too.*

NOVACK: Many of these things are interrelated. When I got a handle on the need to ratchet up safety levels, I started looking at why and how this could happen. The response I kept getting was that the system didn't have enough money, and they couldn't afford to maintain the schools because the state didn't provide enough money for public education. But it turned out that where the school system was strapped for cash, it was because of its own waste in squandering so much money. Overall, it actually had more than enough money to fix the problems.

The people of Miami-Dade County have repeatedly been willing to tax themselves for public education. We are united in saying public education is a priority, and we are willing to pay for it. But what has happened is that there is a terribly unproductive use of our tax dollars. There is a grossly inefficient system here that perpetuates itself year after year. Every few years, the system drapes itself in the clothes of reform, holds up the sign of reform, and proclaims accountability across the land. But nothing changes.

The district claims to have no money for new schools, but in recent months I have uncovered documents showing they have about $1.2 billion in currently available resources, including $400 million in cash. That $400 million is sitting idle while the district does its usual dance of: create a design; develop a plan from the design; commission a study to review the plan; hire consultants to review the study that reviewed the plan; then throw out the design and start all over again. I wish this were some sort of a comedy movie, but it's not. This is the way the district operates.

***CLOWES**: What happens when a new school is built?*

NOVACK: This is another disturbing pattern you see over and over again in the district.

First, the school district approves a construction project after years of preliminary study.

Second, the project takes much more time and costs much more money than was allocated.

Third, the district inspects the completed school and documents all of the construction defects, which sometimes run to hundreds of pages.

Fourth, the district ignores the reported defects, accepts the school as finished, and makes full payment to the contractor.

Fifth, the district opens the school and immediately encounters problems arising from the construction defects, such as leaks and floods; the district documents the problems but carries out only minor or cosmetic repairs.

Sixth, when the warranty on the school construction has expired, the district assigns its own maintenance staff to fix the construction defects; this diverts maintenance efforts from the older schools.

Because of this merry-go-round of irresponsibility, the new schools cost taxpayers too much to build in the first place, their defects consume the district's maintenance crews, and the older schools rot from neglect so they have to be replaced by new ones. And at every chair on this merry-go-round, the public pays.

***CLOWES**: They pay their taxes but don't get their money's worth?*

NOVACK: They don't. Our people here are paying for an "A+" education system but they're only getting a "D" system for their money. As a government official, I know that, generally, government can't do all it wants to because its resources are limited. That's not what we have here. This is a situation where enough money has flowed in but it's been squandered.

I picture this process as a pipeline of money from the public to the schools. The public funnels a lot of money into this pipeline to pay for school construction and maintenance. Yet the school district allows so much money to leak out of holes in the pipeline that very little of the public's investment gets through to the other end in the form of a first-class, modern, state-of-the-art school. That's what we're paying for, but that's not what we're getting.

For more information…

WWW Further information on school safety and construction issues is available at the Town of Surfside's Web site at **http://town.surfside.fl.us/schools.html.**

***CLOWES**: What could be done to establish a more accountable system?*

NOVACK: One of the things we should look at is the size of our school districts. The Miami-Dade County Public School District is the fourth-largest in the country, and it appears to be too big for its own good. Its land area is larger than some states, and its budget rivals that of many nations. Yet it produces very little efficiently and seeks to evade accountability for what it does produce. It has been unable to manage any of its major programs in education, construction, maintenance, or safety. It has lost control over efficiently spending money and producing results. So I think we have to look at reducing the size of the district.

A smaller district would be much closer to the people and there would be a higher level of participation in the system. Right now, with a district that runs from a downtown headquarters and that arrogantly precludes parental involvement and participation, it's become so big, so unwieldy, and so detached that it perpetuates itself in any way it wishes. It's lost all contact with what's happening in the schools.

***CLOWES**: Do you have any advice for mayors in other communities?*

NOVACK: I think mayors need to look to how municipalities can work together on the mutual goals they have with the public school districts. This doesn't mean taking them over, but there should be more cooperation and coordination. For example, cities usually do their planning and zoning without regard to available school capacity.

As a system, though, this will work only if the school district is capable of using its resources effectively. The funds for public schools are a very large percentage of the money that the public puts into play for the public interest, and those funds could be used so much more productively. If you did that, you would see benefits not only in education but also in public safety, economic development, job creation, and many other areas.

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What Does America Think?

Attitudes about school choice, education, and related issues

George A. Clowes

Public opinion polling is a powerful tool for eliciting information about the strength of people's preferences, their understanding of various issues, and their likely choices from a set of alternatives.

However, since polling involves asking questions of a small sample of people, poll results are easily compromised by poorly selected samples or poorly worded questions. Perhaps the best-known example of how decision-makers can be led astray by results from an unrepresentative sample is the 1948 *Chicago Tribune* headline, "Dewey Defeats Truman."

Although sophisticated sampling procedures are the norm today, users of poll data always should check the sample to see who it represents: the American people as a whole, American voters, or voters in a particular state. Sometimes, the sample represents only a specific group, such as teachers, college professors, or union members.

Survey questions themselves also have the potential to produce misleading results, and it is good practice to check exactly what respondents were asked. For example, the following questions would produce markedly different support levels for vouchers:

- "Would you support publicly funded vouchers to help parents transfer their children from unsafe schools?"
- "Would you support publicly funded vouchers if they took money away from children in public schools?"

Finally, poll users should be alert to possible bias in the reporting of opinion poll results. First, "Consider the source," since groups with a specific agenda often conduct polls designed to support that agenda. Second, the reporting itself may be subtly biased, either in terms of the language used to describe the results or in the emphasis placed on negative trends.

NATIONAL SURVEYS

PDK/Gallup Poll:
Jump in Support for School Choice

The percentage of Americans who support allowing parents to spend their education tax dollars at secular and religious private schools jumped sharply from 2001 to 2002, reported the 34th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. The poll, released last August, contains two questions about school choice:

- Asked if they "favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense," 46 percent of respondents were favorable, up 12 points over the 2001 figure of 34 percent. From 1995 to 2000, support levels were 33, 36, 44, 44, 41, and 39 percent respectively.
- Asked whether they would support a proposal for the government to pay "all or part of the tuition" at nonpublic schools, 52 percent were supportive, up 8 points from the 2001 figure of 44 percent. From 1996 to 2000, support levels were 43, 49, 51, 51, and 45 percent respectively.

Poll Criticized

In recent years, the PDK/Gallup Poll has come under criticism from several quarters for allegedly skewing its questions and reporting against vouchers. For example, in the Spring 2002 issue of *Education Next*, Terry Moe of the Hoover Institution criticized the poll for what he called "cooking the questions" against school vouchers and then emphasizing the results that showed less support for school vouchers.

Moe's own opinion survey, conducted in the mid-1990s, found 60 percent of Americans favor a universal voucher system, while only 32 percent opposed it. Details of the poll form the basis of his book, *Schools, Vouchers, and the American Public* (Brookings Institution Press, 2001). Vouchers, he concluded, "appeal to broad constituencies."

AP Poll:
Template for Voucher Opponents

ICR/International Communications Research conducted a poll for the Associated Press in July 2002, asking respondents if they supported the idea of "providing low-income families with tax money in the form of vouchers to help pay for their children to attend private or religious schools?" Some 51 percent supported the idea, with 40 percent opposed. When asked if they still favored vouchers if it meant "there would be less money for the public schools," support plummeted to 31 percent, with opposition jumping to 60 percent. At least two anti-voucher groups have since used similar "explanatory" phrases in their own poll questions to maximize opposition to vouchers.

The August 7 AP story resulting from the poll reported in its opening paragraph that a parent's enthusiasm for vouchers quickly fades "when he hears that tax-supported vouchers would probably *drain money from public schools."* [emphasis added] The story subsequently reported, "The proposal of *funneling tax money to private and parochial schools* and the likelihood that would *drain money from public schools*, is a hot political topic." [emphasis added]

Center for Education Reform:
Majority Favor Vouchers

A poll conducted in July 2002 by Zogby International for the Center for Education Reform found 76 percent of Americans favored the idea of school choice in general. In addition, 63 percent supported a specific proposal to allow poor parents to take their allotted tax dollars for education and use them to attend a private, public, or parochial school of their choosing. The highest support levels for this proposal were among blacks (72 percent) and Republicans (71 percent); a majority of Democrats (54 percent) and union members (64 percent) also favored the proposal.

Two-thirds of Blacks Would Pull Children from Public Schools

If given a choice, almost two-thirds (63 percent) of black parents would transfer their children from their current public school to a charter school or a private school, according to a survey of 1,000 registered black voters conducted last June by Public Opinion Strategies for Black America's Political Action Committee. A majority (56 percent) gave public schools only a C- grade or lower, citing lack of discipline, overcrowding, lack of learning resources, and crime as the biggest problems with their schools.

Even though 82 percent of those polled called themselves Democrats, 40 percent said the Democratic Party has taken them for granted—up from 27 percent in a 2001 poll. The percentage of blacks who stated the Democratic Party has served them well dropped from 61 percent in 2001 to 49 percent in 2002.

A survey of 1,647 black voters during September and October 2002 by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found those identifying themselves as Democrats had dropped to 63 percent from 74 percent two years earlier. Those identifying themselves as Republicans increased from 6 percent to 10 percent. A clear majority (57 percent) of those polled favor an education system "where parents get the money from the government to send their children to the public, private, or parochial school of their choice."

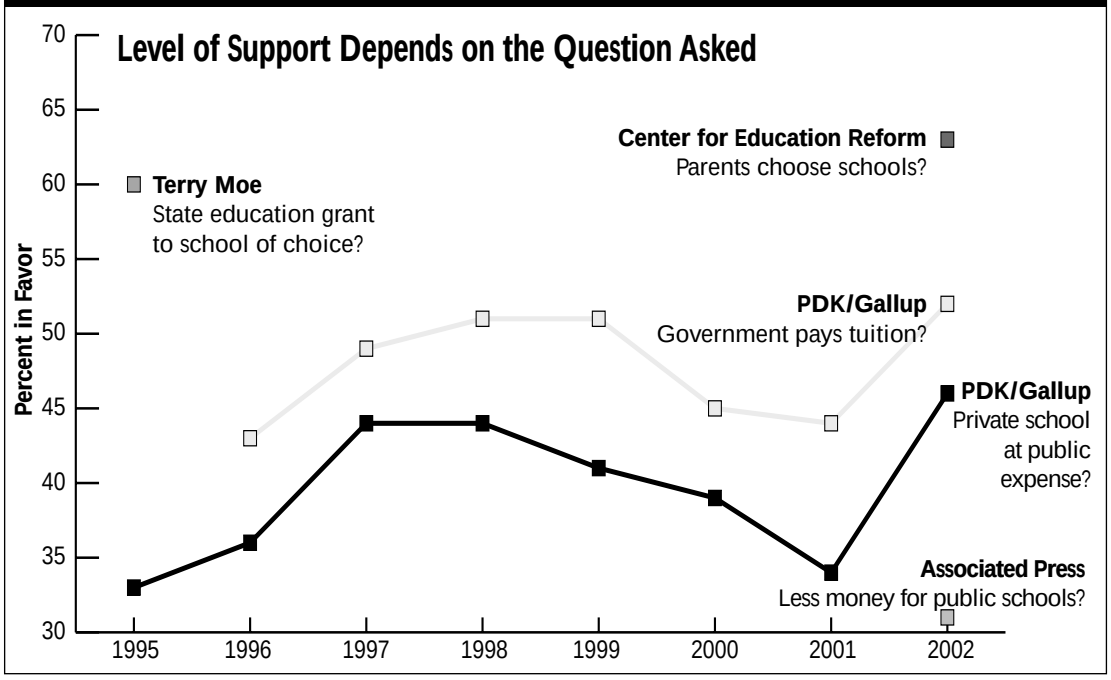
Out of Sync:
Blacks and Black Elected Officials

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies also conducted an important earlier study that was published in 2001 under the title, "Changing of the Guard: Generational Differences Among Black Elected Officials," by David A. Bositis. Drawing on 1999 surveys of the black adult population (900 respondents) and black elected officials (800 respondents), Bositis reported sharp differences in attitudes between the two groups and by age within the groups.

In the black population in general, only 40 percent rated their local public schools as good or excellent, with a clear majority (58 percent) rating them fair or poor. Among black elected officials, a clear majority (55 percent) rated their local public schools as good or excellent, with 44 percent rating them fair or poor. However, among black school board officials, an overwhelming majority (71 percent) rated their local public schools as good or excellent, with just 29 percent rating them fair or poor.

With regard to using publicly funded vouchers at public, private, or parochial schools, 60 percent of black adults favored the idea, with only 33 percent opposed. While 71 percent of blacks aged 18-25 favored vouchers, less than 50 percent of blacks over 50 favored them. Among black elected officials, an overwhelming majority (69 percent) opposed vouchers, with only 25 percent in favor. While 73 percent or more of black elected officials over 50 opposed vouchers, opposition dropped to just 44 percent among officials under 40, with 49 percent in favor.

The American Public and Vouchers



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**Now That I'm Here,
I Want to Speak English**
Just under one-third (32 percent) of U.S. immigrants believe students should be able to take some courses in their native languages in U.S. public schools, according to a recent survey of 1,002 immigrants released in January. Almost two-thirds (63 percent) of immigrants said all public school classes should be taught only in English. The responses are similar to those of the general public in a 1999 survey by *The Washington Post*, the Henry J. Kaiser Foundation, and Harvard University.

Although Mexican and Caribbean immigrants favored bilingual education more than European and East Asian immigrants, English-only classes were preferred by a majority of all groups surveyed. The study, called "Now That I'm Here," was conducted by Public Agenda, a non-partisan opinion research group based in New York City.

STATE-LEVEL POLLS

**Colorado Union Poll Discovers
Opposition to Vouchers**
When asked a question that focused on using tax dollars to support private and religious schools rather than using tax dollars to support the choices of parents, a clear majority (60 percent) of Coloradans opposed the idea, with only 38 percent in favor. The question, "Do you favor or oppose using public tax money to pay tuition for children to attend private and religious schools?" was asked in a poll of 651 Colorado voters conducted in February by Harstad Strategic Research of Boulder for the Colorado Education Association. The 60 percent level of opposition paralleled the popular vote against a 1998 ballot initiative that proposed a state tax credit for private or religious school tuition.

"[S]ince polling involves asking questions of a small sample of people, poll results are easily compromised by poorly selected samples or poorly worded questions."

**Majority Favor Vouchers in
Connecticut**
In an October 2002 survey of 726 Connecticut residents aged 18 and over, 51 percent favored giving parents education tax credits or vouchers to pay for their child's tuition at a private or parochial school; 43 opposed the idea. Support was lower in rural (39 percent) and suburban (48 percent) areas, and higher in urban areas (67 percent). The poll was commissioned by the University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education.

**Anti-Voucher Group Finds Vouchers
Opposed in DC**
In an Associated Press poll conducted last July, opposition to vouchers increased from 40 percent to 60 percent when respondents were asked if they would still favor vouchers if it meant "there would be less money for the public schools."

In November, the National School Boards Association, a group opposed to vouchers, had Zogby International push the question even further into negative territory. Some 603 voters in the District of Columbia were asked if they supported "giving taxpayer-funded vouchers to parents to pay for their children to attend private or religious schools *even if* that means less money for public school students." [emphasis added] This question produced 76 percent opposition overall, and 85 percent opposition among blacks.

In a May 1998 poll conducted by *The Washington Post*, 56 percent of District residents supported the idea of using federal dollars to help low-income children attend private or parochial schools.

Louisiana Voters Support Vouchers
Fifty-eight percent of Louisiana voters support vouchers to allow students from low-income families to attend a private school, according to a new poll released in November by the Council for a Better Louisiana. The poll, conducted by New Orleans pollster Ed Renwick, also reports 51 percent in favor of vouchers for students in failing schools, and 45 percent in favor of vouchers for all students regardless of family income.

**Michiganders Favor Tax Credits and
Charter Schools**
In a recent poll conducted by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, Michigan voters opposed vouchers by a ratio of 50:43. However, 67 percent supported tax credits.

In another poll of 933 Michigan residents, released in December by the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research at Michigan State University, almost three out of four respondents (72 percent) support charter schools. Other findings include:

- Support rises to 75 percent among blacks, and falls to 71 percent among whites.
- Support rises to 79 percent among parents with children under 18.
- Support rises to 83 percent among people aged 30-49.

A survey of Michigan's largest charter school management company, National Heritage Academies (NHA), found very high levels of satisfaction among the 10,000 parents surveyed last summer by Wirthlin Worldwide. Parents ranked NHA in the 91st percentile or higher on each of 16 questions. Among the findings:

- 96.3 percent agreed "My child's school delivers on its promise of academic excellence."
- 96.2 percent agreed "My child's school delivers on the promise of moral guidance."
- 93.7 percent agreed "My child enjoys attending this school."

NHA manages a network of public charter schools in Michigan, North Carolina, New York, and Ohio.

Oklahomans Favor School Choice
A November poll reports that six in 10 Oklahomans (61 percent) support giving parents tax breaks—in the form of tax credits—that would help parents send their children to the public, private, or parochial school of their choice. The poll was conducted by the University of Oklahoma Survey Research Center in cooperation with Wilson Research Strategies.

**Pennsylvanians Oppose Public
Funds Going to Private Schools**
When asked a question that focused on using public funds to support private and religious schools rather than using public funds to support the choices of parents, a majority (54 percent) of Pennsylvanians opposed the idea, with 40 percent in favor. The question, "Do you favor or oppose using public funds to pay for students to attend a private, religious, or parochial school?" was asked in a poll of 805 Pennsylvanians conducted in August and September last year by Madonna Young Opinion Research for the Pennsylvania State Education Association.

Those who responded favorably to the first question were asked, "Would you favor this idea if it means less money for local public schools?" In their responses to this question, almost half the initial supporters switched to becoming opponents.

Diehard Fans

"Our greatest weakness is our diehard commitment to the Democratic Party. The Democrats don't listen to us and the Republicans don't think we'll ever vote for them."

Participant at the 2003 Symposium of the Black Alliance for Educational Options

Texans Divided on School Vouchers
Only 40 percent of Texans support the idea of allowing students to use publicly funded vouchers to pay tuition at private schools, with 47 percent against the idea, according to a Scripps-Howard Texas Poll of 1,000 Texans conducted last October. That's not much different from the 41:49 split recorded in a similar poll in February 1999. But when a pilot voucher program is suggested for students attending low-performing schools, support warms to 47 percent and opposition falls to 44 percent. That's slightly better than February 1999, when 45 percent favored a pilot program and 46 percent opposed.

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News.

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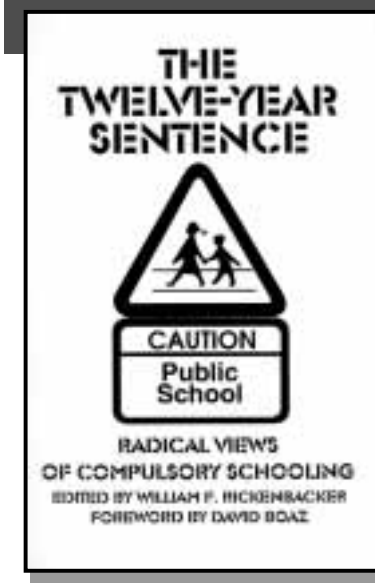

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JUST THE FACTS:

Civics Education

Compiled by George A. Clowes

Although in theory they recognize the importance of civics education for the future of the nation, many Americans in fact lack an understanding of their form of government and the Constitution under which they live. In the 1998 Civics component of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only 26 percent of twelfth-graders had an understanding of civics rated "Proficient or Above."

This lack of proficiency leads to some serious misconceptions, as a recent Columbia Law School survey showed. Although the Founding Fathers wrote the U.S. Constitution to protect individual rights and property, one-third of adult Americans think the document contains the Karl Marx maxim that negates all rights to property: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." Only 31 percent of respondents were sure Marx's words weren't in the Constitution, while the remaining third didn't know.

Various efforts are underway to promote civics education in the U.S. The latest kicked off in January, when Siemens Corporation and National History Day (NHD) announced a partnership with several other groups to sponsor a civics initiative for middle and high school students called "Our Documents." The initiative provides teachers with a free sourcebook of documents from 100 critical moments in U.S. history to support the theme of "Rights and Responsibilities in History." Further details are available at **www.nationalhistoryday.org**.

Civics Achievement Levels

Under the auspices of the National Center for Education Statistics, a part of the U.S. Department of Education, the NAEP regularly reports to the public on the educational progress of students in grades 4, 8, and 12. The national assessment of civics knowledge, performed in 1998, has three main components: civic knowledge, intellectual skills, and civic dispositions. Results are reported as scale scores and by achievement level: Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. "Proficient" is the level identified by the National Assessment Governing Board as the standard all students should reach.

Only 23 percent of fourth-graders, 22 percent of eighth-graders, and 26 percent of twelfth-graders scored at Proficient or Advanced. (See Figure 1.) At the other end of the spectrum, almost one-third of all students scored below Basic—31 percent of fourth-graders, 30 percent of eighth-graders, and 35 percent of twelfth-graders.

Demographic Factors

The variation in civics achievement among twelfth-graders by gender is minor, with 27 percent of males and 26 percent of females scoring at Proficient or Above. (See Figure 2.) However, the variation by type of school attended is larger, with 39 percent of twelfth-graders in Catholic schools achieving at Proficient or Above compared to 25 percent in public schools.

Achievement levels by race/ethnicity show a greater range of variation. Thirty-three percent of White students and 28 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students achieved at Proficient and Above, compared to 11 percent of Hispanic students and 9 percent of both Black and Native American students.

Achievement levels by education level of the parents show the greatest range of variation. Thirty-six percent of twelfth-graders whose parents graduated from college achieve at Proficient or Above, compared to only 14 percent of students whose parents graduated from high school and just 6 percent of students whose parents did not graduate from high school. Even poverty, as measured by eligibility for the Free/Reduced Price Lunch program, did not produce such a dramatic range of student achievement.

FIGURE 2

1998 NAEP Civics Test - Twelfth Grade

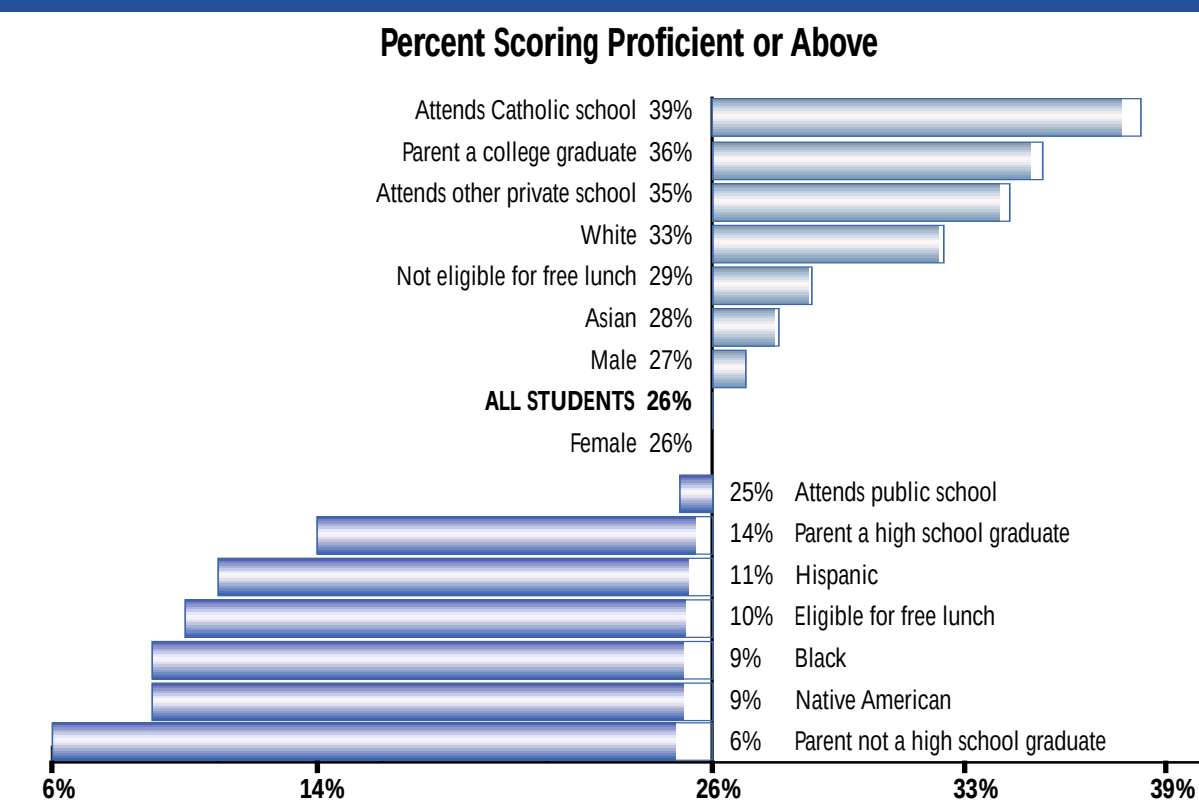

FIGURE 1

NAEP 1998 Civics Achievement Levels

Percentage of students at the level shown

GRADE	BELOW BASIC	AT BASIC	AT PROFICIENT OR ABOVE
4	31	46	23
8	30	48	22
12	35	39	26

For more information…

WWW The "Our Documents Teacher Sourcebook," created by National History Day, Inc. in cooperation with the National Archives, is available free to educators by emailing **info@nationalhistoryday.org**. Further information about "Our Documents" is available from NHD's Web site at **www.nationalhistoryday.org.**

The November 1999 report from the National Center for Education Statistics, *The NAEP 1998 Civics Report Card for the Nation*, NCES 2000-457, by A.D. Lutkus, A.R. Weiss, J.R. Campbell, J. Mazzeo, & S. Lazer, is available from the NAEP Web site at **http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main1998/2000457.pdf.**

The May 2002 Columbia Law School survey is available online at **www.law.columbia.edu/news/surveys/survey_constitution/press_release.shtml**

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